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A Stitch in Time Saves Afghan Youth



Abdul Ahmad, 15, was in a car with a friend when they were stopped at a police checkpoint. The police arrested them thinking they belonged to the Taliban. Though Abdul continued to insist he never had any dealings with the Taliban, he was sent to a crowded juvenile detention facility in Kandahar City. He was incarcerated with more than 60 boys aged between 13 and 17. The inmates' crimes ranged from petty theft to murder. Abdul was unusual in being able to read and write. Most of the inmates cannot and they have no marketable skills, which makes them vulnerable to Taliban recruitment. This gap is being filled by a USAID program, which is providing vocational training to dozens of juvenile offenders. The inmates work with master tailors for two months, learning skills that will secure them apprenticeships upon their release. They learn how to take measurements, use a sewing machine and make a *shalwar kameez*, the standard apparel for Afghan men.

Photo: USAID/S-RAD/IRD

Mohammed Nazim, director of the detention centre, says the program offers juvenile offenders a source of income. "The Taliban preys on boys like this. Most have no families, no education, no hope. The Taliban has always been the easy way out for these boys. Now they have another option." As he attaches a cuff to a sleeve, his instructor looking on, Abdul says the training is invaluable. "One day I want to go to university, but I'll need money. Once I've finished this course, I'll be able to find work in one of the many tailoring shops in town." Before his incarceration, Abdul was planning a future working with computers. But having completed his third *shalwar kameez*, he's found a new interest, and one that will enable him to find work rightaway.

USAID is providing vocational training to boys in a detention facility who are vulnerable to Taliban recruitment propaganda